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AUTHOR Wilson, James L.
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ABSTRACT

This report describes how successful statewide programs of educational standards and assessment are established and briefly discusses causes of program failure. Four key stages characterize effective program establishment: (1) planning, (2) development, (3) implementation, and (4) monitoring. Planning involves interaction among all parties, for example, state government, state departments of education, and school districts. As many concerns as possible should be identified before development begins. Development follows the decision to create a program, standard, or test. The state departments of education should assume leadership at this time, though the origin of program mandate determines the level of state involvement. Local educational agencies must also be primary developers. Implementation rests with school districts, which are ultimately accountable for program success. If districts are unwilling to assume the major role or if the state is unwilling to allow them, resistance will plague the implementation stage. Monitoring is perhaps the most important program stage. The state educational department, not local districts, should monitor such frequently complex programs. Inconsistencies emerge with district monitoring, and districts are too involved to evaluate objectively; outside monitoring establishes credibility. Four figures illustrating program establishment stages are appended. (CJH)

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Implementing State Standards and Assessment Programs Successfully - A Model for State Governments, Departments of Education and Local School Districts

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by

James L. Wilson, Ed.D.
Superintendent,
Cape Henlopen School Dist.
Nassau, DE 19969

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Development and implementation of statewide standards and evaluations have been increasingly evident throughout the country during recent years. Not that some did not exist previously but certainly not to the degree they do today. Mastery tests, teacher competency tests and school and staff evaluation instruments are examples of such programs which have been emerging with tremendous frequency in most states.

It doesn't matter whether these are happening as knee-jerk responses to education reports and public opinion, or are the ambitious efforts of ambitious politicians jumping on the bandwagon or are a part of an overall plan for improving education beginning, and I emphasize beginning, at the state level. The fact is they are happening; and, in some cases they are being quite successful and in others they are failing or falling far short of their intent.

Upon examining several programs one can observe that program failure can often be attributed to either state governments (executive and legislative), state departments of education, or local school districts not fulfilling or overstepping the role they should play. Conversely, successful programs are more likely to occur when these key agencies perform their roles and responsibilities appropriately.

This does not mean community groups, colleges and universities, teacher

unions and others do not play important roles; however, they are primarily either a resource or pressure group which may, and probably will, become directly involved with any of the key agencies mentioned. This involvement may be solicited or imposed depending upon the situation, and discussion of the resulting dynamics is a complete presentation by itself.

Now that we have the players identified, it is important to note that there are four key stages in the establishment of any program. They are planning, development, implementation and monitoring. In each stage, state government, state educational agencies and local school districts can play certain roles which will increase the chances of the program being successful. With the assistance of a few visuals, I would like to more fully describe these roles.

Planning (fig. 1.) - At the planning stage, it is necessary for all parties to have an opportunity to interact with one another. Regardless of where the concept for a program is initiated or has its greatest support, it is important for everyone to have a chance to discuss the topic on a fairly equal basis before a decision is made prematurely to move into the development stage. This does not mean that consensus must be established, and expecting or requiring consensus is often why some programs never get off the ground. It does help to assure, however, that, as much as possible, problems, concerns, strengths, etc., are identified before development begins.

Development (fig. 2.) - Once the decision is made to develop a statewide program, standard or test, it then becomes important for one group to take the leadership role and that agency should be the state department of education. It is also crucial that local districts also play a main role in development since they are the ones most directly involved with the schools, students and staff who will be affected and/or evaluated by these programs. Depending on whether the establishment of the program was mandated by state law or executive order will determine the level of state government involvement, but it should be clear that staff from state and local educational agencies who have the experience and training must be the primary developers of the program.

If indeed the establishment was mandated by state government, it is essential that clear communication is maintained with them to assure that what is being developed is congruent with their intent. Failure to do so usually results in problems at later stages, including mistrust and the lack of adequate funding.

Implementation (fig. 3.) - The primary responsibility for implementing most programs should rest with the local school districts since they are the ones which ultimately will determine its success and be held accountable for its failure. The state educational agency still plays a vital role in directing the implementation and assuring

statewide consistency, but programs at this point are usually more successful if it is the school districts themselves which play the major role. In fact if the school districts are not willing to play the major role or if the state is not willing to let them, you can almost be certain the implementation stage will be plagued with difficulty and resistance.

Monitoring (Fig. 4.) - This is the last but probably the most important stage of any program. As a district superintendent, I am probably going to sound like a traitor to my coharts in local school districts, but I honestly feel and have observed that state standards and programs really are more valid and publicly accepted when the monitoring and evaluation is controlled at the state level. Even when state guidelines for monitoring are quite specific, I don't feel local districts should monitor programs of this magnitude and importance on their own.

First, too many variables and resulting inconsistencies emerge when individual school districts do the monitoring.

Second, local school districts are just too close to the situation to be objective evaluators. A classic example of this is the former Title I (now Chapter I) programs. Scriven once stated he was amazed when he was consulting with the federal government to discover that

out of all the millions of Title I dollars spent in thousands of school districts, there wasn't one local district which presented evidence that showed their program was unsuccessful.

Regardless of how ethical or moral a district may be, the need for outside monitoring is essential. The outside monitoring also establishes credibility, which a local school district cannot. Although local districts may resist or resent such monitoring and evaluation, especially when comparisons are publicized, they will also quickly refer to them or allow them to be referred to when the results are favorable.

So, there you have the key players and the key stages that exist in the establishment of statewide programs. You may want to look at the programs in your own state to see whether their success or failure may support the model that has been put forth. If you are embarking on a new state program, I would encourage you to be aware of this model and make sure the other players are also. Like any other production, it will be more successful if everyone has a concept of his/her role in each scene before the play begins.

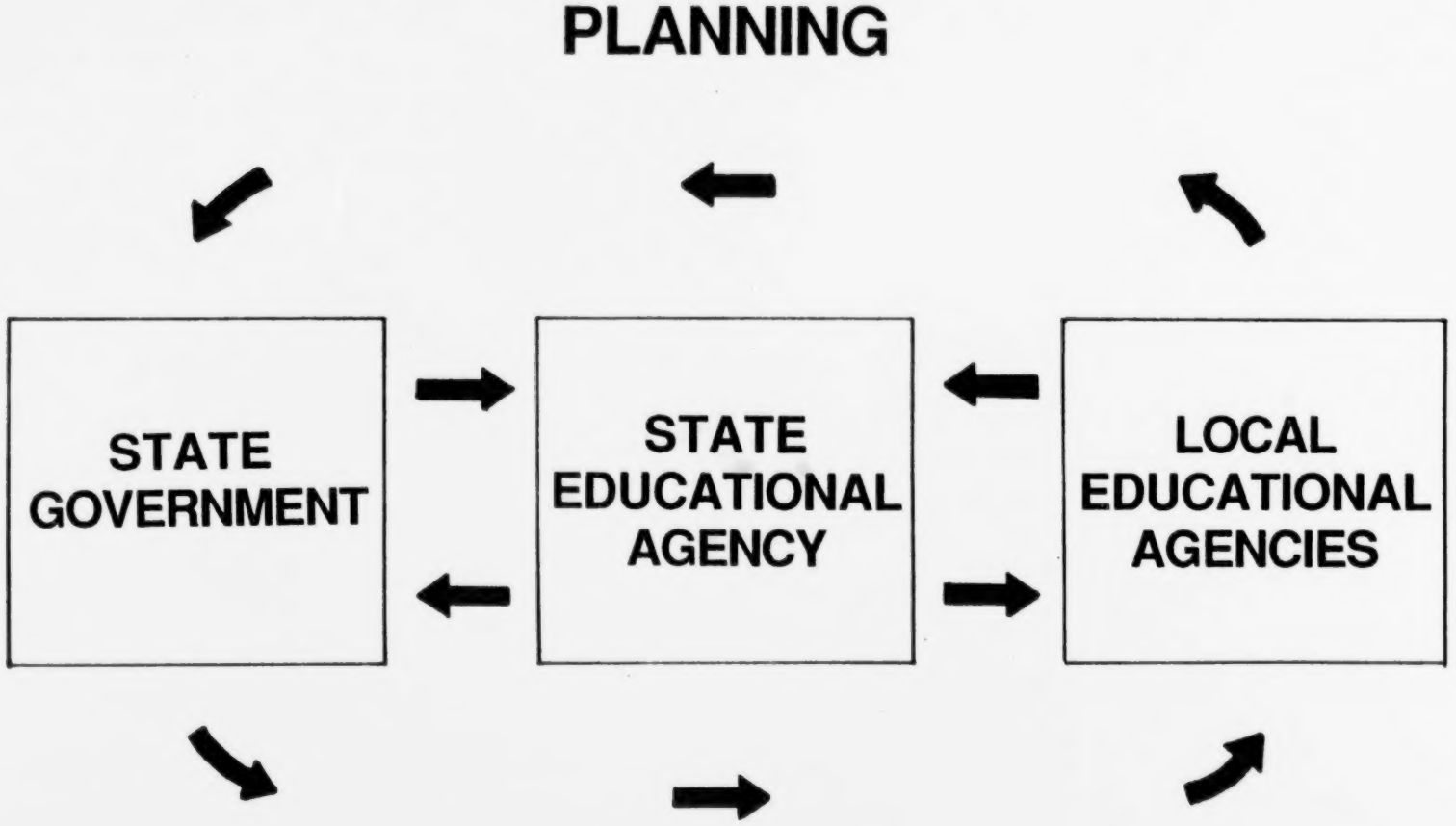

PLANNING
STATE GOVERNMENT
STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY
LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES

FIGURE 1

DEVELOPMENT

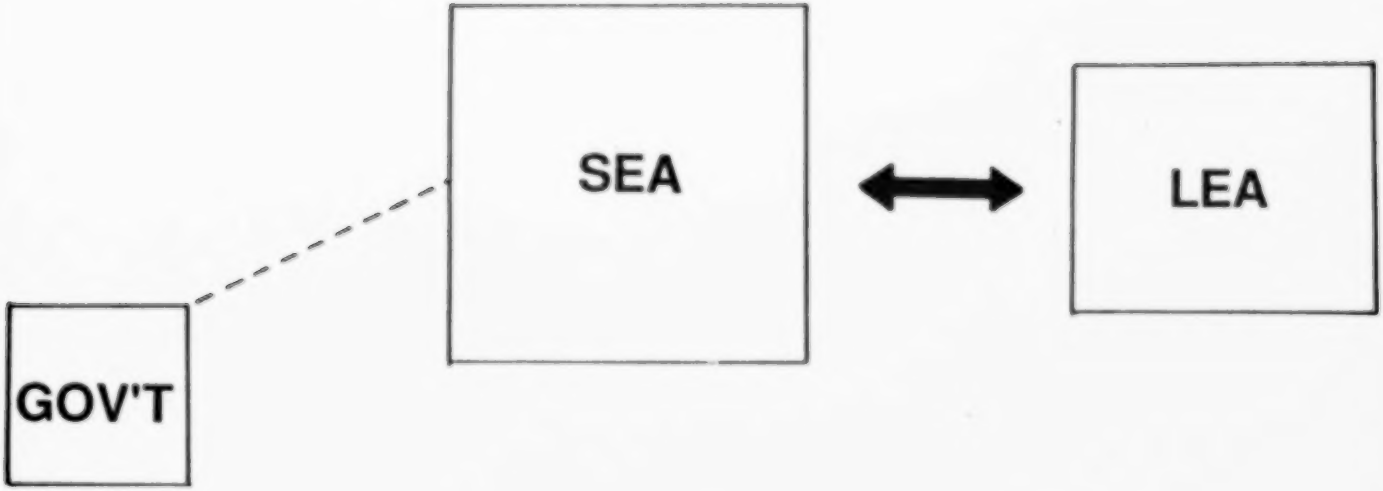
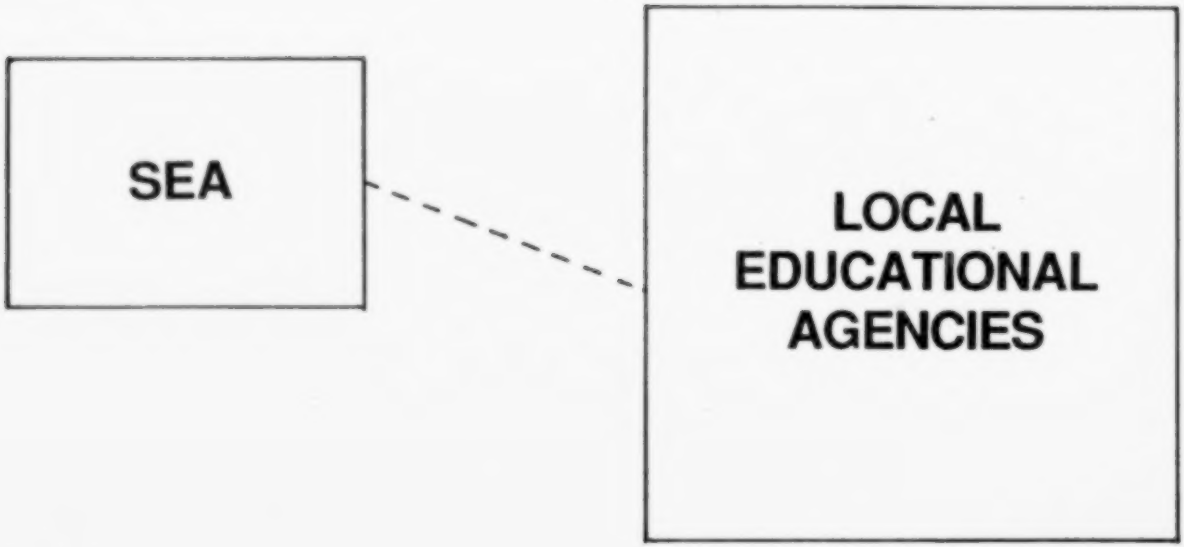


FIGURE 2

IMPLEMENTATION



IGURE 3

MONITORING

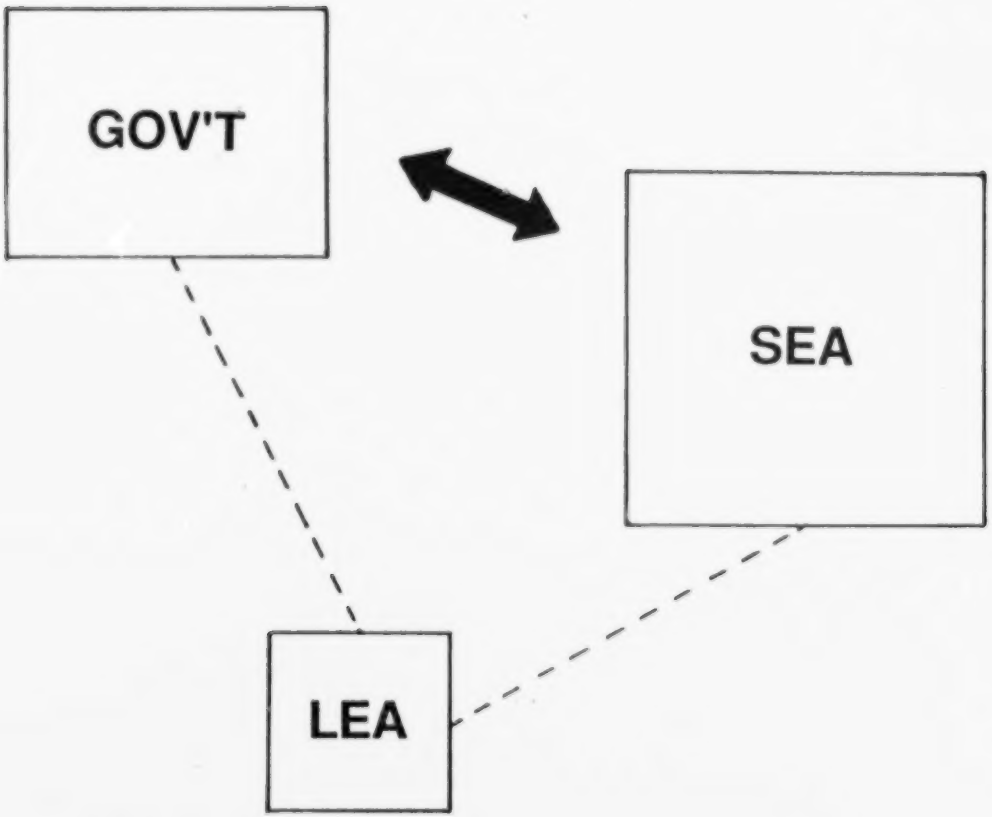


FIGURE 4